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VISN 23 Mental Health Service Line Newsletter

Special Edition: Ending Homelessness Among Veterans

Volume 1, Issue 1

January 2012

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“Our progress in the fight against homelessness has been significant, but our work is not complete until no Veteran has to sleep on the street”

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki

Announcing the Mental Health Service Line Newsletter

Submitted by Dr. Brian Cook

Greetings from the Midwest Healthcare Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 23 Mental Health Service Line (MHSL).

I would like to introduce you to the first newsletter from our Service Line. This issue is devoted to highlighting VISN 23 efforts to end homelessness among Veterans. I am excited to send this issue to you, and I hope you find it useful. Current plans are to publish a newsletter at least twice per year.

Why a newsletter? Mental Health is among the highest priorities in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). Many new advances and improvements have been accomplished in mental health over the recent years. I hope that this newsletter can provide you with timely and updated information on various programs and services we provide in our Service Line.

Why now? Given the dramatic advances in mental health care, I feel proud to inform our VA staff, our community partners, our Veteran Service Officers, and other stakeholders of how we are providing the best mental health care anywhere to our Veterans and returning service members. Now more than ever we need to widely disseminate information about our expansive array of services to help ensure all parties know how to access mental health care and what care is available.

On behalf of Mr. Barry Sharp, our VISN 23 MHSL Director and Director of the Iowa City Health Care System, our VISN 23 MHSL Staff, and myself we hope you find our newsletter helpful and informative. Please give us your feedback and enjoy this first edition!



Dr. Brian Cook

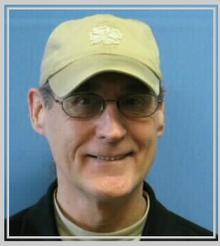
Evidenced-Based Practices in Homeless Programs

Submitted by Jessica Arndt

The Minneapolis VA HCS Homeless programs have implemented several evidence based treatment modalities to promote Veterans in their recovery. These practices are provided both through individual and group programming. Several staff members have specialized training in Harm Reduction, Motivational Interviewing, Cognitive Processing Therapy, Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy, and Social Skills Training.

Examples of group programming include SMART Recovery, a CBT based recovery group. The SMART group is unique in that it is offered on-site at three apartment buildings in the Minneapolis area where HUD VASH Veterans are housed. Community Integration Group is a weekly drop-in group where Veterans in the Homeless programs can connect with one another, share resources, and offer support to one another in the housing search. It is a time when a Veteran who is experiencing homelessness can meet other Veterans who relate to their circumstances.

This group is integral to building a sense of community among Veterans served in Homeless programs and has been referred to as not unlike, "A Band of Brothers and Sisters."



Veteran Russ

"I see Veterans on a daily basis and am once again proud of my service to my Country at a time of need"

Russ

The Women of War residential training center complex is for female military Veterans and their dependent children.

A Veteran Shares His Story

Submitted by Candice Cummings

Russ is a Vietnam Veteran; while in Vietnam he commanded a unit of 34 officers and 350 men in 1968-1969. He is a college graduate and holds an MBA graduate degree and has conducted business and education initiatives in 34 countries. In 2008 a banking scandal resulted in Russ losing his job and having his home foreclosed on. He eventually became homeless. Encouragement from his daughter led him to seek assistance from the VA.

"The first person I met was Karen Cordie, Homeless Case Manager, who was kind, accepting and understanding. She walked me through the initial intake process with the Eligibility Office, even though I did not have my DD-214 on my person. If it were not for Karen's patience and encouragement, I would have left the VA campus that very first day and never returned, since I was greatly depressed, entirely numb and unwilling to turn and face my demons. The most transformative intervention provided by the VA began when Dr. Kyle Lythgoe, Clinical Psychologist, encouraged me to take his course in Anger Management. I emerged 12-weeks later with a structured anger management plan, which I use daily. I see once-angry Veterans emerge, as I did, from Anger Management better equipped to handle life's challenges."

In addition to Anger Management courses, Russ also received counseling, housing assistance, and employment assistance through the Homeless Veterans Supported Employment Program (HVSEP). The program trains Veterans who were formerly homeless, to assist Veterans currently experiencing homelessness in finding permanent, competitive employment. Russ feels that employment at the VA has been a tremendous benefit.

Women of War: New GPD Program for Women Veterans

Submitted by Clint Olive

The new Grant and Per Diem program, Women of War Project, provides residential job training quarters and services for homeless women Veterans both with and without children, regardless of whether they served in combat. The program is located in Belle Fourche, SD, a small and quiet community that allows Veterans to regain stability within their lives while pursuing the goal of self-sufficiency. There are two dormitory buildings, a cafeteria building, and an administrative/counseling/education building.

The complex is peer-led and the women will share in chores, recreational planning and gardening. The program seeks to offer participants the opportunity to develop new coping skills, education and employment. The Veterans are expected to participate in several group activities designed to build self-awareness, communication skills, and coping methods based on proven practices. The program is currently open and accepting applications.



Central Iowa HVSEP Works!

Submitted by David Campbell

The Homeless Veterans Supported Employment Project (HVSEP) is an exciting new service that integrates vocational and homeless services for Veterans. HVSEP is a time-limited return-to-work program designed to assist Veterans obtain and maintain competitive employment opportunities in the community. The guiding principles of HVSEP: Eligibility is based upon Zero Exclusion; Integration of Vocational and Homeless Treatment Services; Individualized Vocational Services are provided that result in Competitive Employment; Benefits Counseling is Provided; Rapid and Individualized Job Search is Provided For Competitive Jobs; On-Going Follow-Along Supports are Provided; and, Attention is Given to Each Veteran’s Preferences.

At VA Central Iowa in Des Moines, two HVSEP Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists, Lori Durrett and Danny Sims and Vocational Rehabilitation Coordinator Danny Russell have had tremendous success in the first six months since the implementation of HVSEP. Veterans are quickly finding good permanent jobs at decent wages as evidenced in the latest VA Central Iowa HVSEP report card.

Active Caseload	No. of Veterans Employed	Average Earnings	Employment Rate	Total Caseload Permanent Job Rate	Average Workdays of CWT Service	Average Workdays Until Employed	Avg. No. Pre-Hire Job Contacts	No. of Discharges	Total No. Veterans Served
58	38	\$11.37	49%	52%	37	20	3	22	80



VA-HUD: Homelessness Among Veterans Declines 12% in 2011

The Departments of Veterans Affairs and Housing and Urban Development announced that a new national report shows that homelessness among Veterans has been reduced by nearly 12% between January 2010 and January 2011. According to the 2011 supplement to the Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) released in December, 67,495 Veterans were homeless in the United States on a single night in January 2011 -- a significant reduction from last year’s single night count of 76,329.



New Homeless PACT Team in Iowa City

Submitted by Dr. Catherine Woodman

The Iowa City VA HCS is very pleased to announce plans to develop a Homeless Patient Aligned Care Team (PACT) to provide primary and mental health care, substance abuse treatment services, assistance with housing needs, and vocational counseling services in one location. Co-located care with a team of providers will result in better coordination of care for Veterans receiving services through the homeless program and to achieve long-term permanent housing. The Coralville CBOC will serve as the location for the Homeless PACT team. This clinic is a free-standing clinical annex affiliated with the Iowa City VA Medical Center.

In order to adapt to Iowa City’s rural catchment area, the Homeless PACT team will provide services in four different settings: face-to-face appointments at the Coralville CBOC, tele-health appointments in other CBOCs, tele-health appointments in homeless outreach locations, and tele-health visits that will occur in the field where ever the Veteran is located. Through tele-health, homeless outreach social workers can connect Veterans experiencing homelessness to health care providers and counselors. These innovative service delivery systems will utilize VA-approved web-based software applications in order to allow geographically remote Veterans to meet with medical professionals, via image and sound, at any VA medical facility.

The Homeless PACT team will become operational this spring, and will work with the Central Region’s Veterans Rural Health Resource Center in Iowa City to study outcomes to determine the success of the Homeless PACT model.

Minneapolis VA Health Care System was also awarded funding for a Homeless PACT Team.

**VISN 23:
VA Midwest
Health Care
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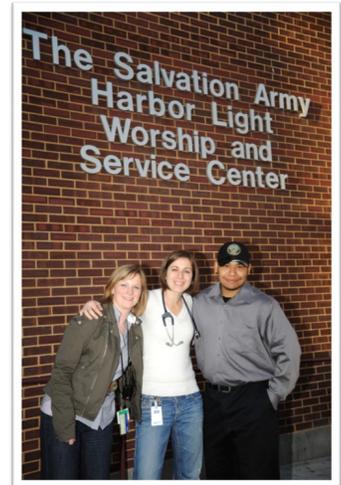
2011 A Busy Year for Homeless Programs

Submitted by Lisa McGuire

The past year has been a very busy and productive year for the VISN 23 Homeless Programs and staff. Six of our sites have operational Drop-in Centers where Veterans experiencing homelessness can come to do laundry, use a computer, get warm or have a cup of coffee, just to name a few of the resources available. Contract Residential beds are often used as a resource for emergency housing and VISN 23 now has 69 beds at 6 sites with more planned for 2012! Three sites are in the planning stages for Community Resource and Referral Centers which will serve as a one-stop resource for Veterans with needs related to homelessness. Patient Aligned Care Teams (PACT) have been funded in Iowa City and Minneapolis to enhance healthcare services in the homeless programs.

The Veterans Justice Outreach program has 3 Veterans Courts currently operating with 2 more planned to be operational in early FY12. Summit meetings with community partners were held at 24 locations and 34 Stand Down events occurred last year. The HUD VASH program had 1050 vouchers with 50 more added in December. The hard-working HUD VASH staff assisted Veterans in using 88% of those vouchers in FY11. This was second in the nation for use of vouchers!

In order to capture all this workload the homeless staff were issued laptop computers so they could stay current with their documentation while "on the go." And all this is just a modest representation of the projects, initiatives, expansion, training, interventions, and compassion provided by the VISN 23 Homeless Staff!!



Overview of VISN 23 Homeless Population

Submitted by Lisa McGuire

Veterans Served in Homeless Programs 2011	
Location	#
Fargo	861
Des Moines	1093
Omaha	833
Minneapolis	1164
Sioux Falls	1213
Black Hills	1184
St. Cloud	710
Iowa City	411

VISN 23 has 24 Grant and Per Diem programs with 395 beds. There are 400 Residential Rehab Treatment Program beds and 69 Contract Residential beds. There are currently 1100 housing vouchers issued to VISN 23 through the HUD VASH program.

A Snapshot of VISN 23 Veterans Experiencing Homelessness	
Male	93.6%
Female	6.3%
Age 18-29	5.7%
Age 30-45	16.2%
Age 46-62	55.3%
Age 62 and greater	22.8%
White	63.7%
African American	24.3%
Native American	6.2%
Hispanic	3.9%
Combat Veterans (in any conflict)	17.1%
Not serving during period of conflict	48.4%
Persian Gulf	21.2%
Vietnam	29.4%
Korean	.8%
World War II	.2%

